

Serving the Same Master


Mon, 1/27 8:07PM 32:45

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

slaves, paul, slavery, christian, christ, master, masters, verse, god, relationship, culture, lord, obey, ephesians, realize, authority, word, display, heart, christians

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Ephesians 5. verse 15: Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. And then in chapter 6, verse 5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. 9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. How is your faith in Christ displayed itself this past week? And I expect you to answer that out loud but I want you think about that for a moment just how has your faith in Christ displayed itself this past week? Because in Ephesians, five verses 22 and following Paul's been talking about what our faith should look like and and pics three strategic areas very sensitive and personal areas. He's talking about what your face should look like in your marriage in your home. With your spouse, then he's talked about what it should look like in terms of parent, child, parent, even adult children, relationships, what that should look like. And then he comes to the third area, the relationship between Christian slaves and Christian masters. And I'm thinking about the chorus we song about God's goodness, it does make you wonder if you were sitting here in the first century, and you were a Christian slave, would you be singing

about God's goodness? Or would it be difficult for you to sing that God is good when you realize you're under the care and supervision of another person, and not just another person, but a Christian master. So we're going to take a look at this passage in Ephesians six and focus on verses five through nine. And we'll do this and looking at first just the question Practice of slavery, even just saying the word slavery to many people today would cause them to Russell. They would push back and say, the Bible is racist. You know, it's talking about slavery. No one's condoning it. No one's saying it's got to stop. What's with that? So we do need to look at the practice of slavery from a biblical perspective. But then we'll also touch upon the counsel that is given to both Christian slaves, and Christian masters. And then finally, we'll come around to considering where the implications of this passage for today because we quickly realize circumstances historical setting is very different. But yet Is there something here a biblical principle that translates all cultures, and all timeframes in history? So let's begin with looking at the practice of slavery. As it is found in the Scriptures, because it is very important that as Christians, we address this clearly. So we know that from an old testament perspective, slavery was practice in Israel. But there are many different reasons as to why slavery was practice where one would place themselves under the care the direction of another individual. Most of those times were related related to paying off a debt. Other times it was related to a sense of economic security. That in terms of working and laboring, your master was responsible to provide for your physical needs your shelter and in return, you labored for them. We quickly realized that the Old Testament and the law of God regulated the conditions responsibilities and rights, not just Just have masters, but have slaves and masters. And it clearly is a cultural practice that spoke of unconditional obedience and allegiance, which is very important because we see out of that picture commands such as we read in Deuteronomy 10. This morning, you are to serve God and that is a picture of have sold out obedience and allegiance with all of our heart. Notice as well in the Old Testament, you have many regulations as to how and when a slave can purchase their freedom. What the fair prices for redemption, for becoming free the responsibilities that may come with that and they acknowledge that for many, they chose not to do that because of the situation. And the relationship that was there with the one who was over them. So we must not equate Old Testament slavery with the slavery we've seen in American history. Those are two completely different paradigms. And so the Scripture is not condoning oppressive treatment and slavery that's related to race. So notice when you think of slavery in the Old Testament, it was not determined by race. There were many who were slaves are of all different ethnicities. And that carries over now when we get to Paul's words in Ephesians, to consider now what about the New Testament perspective? Because you can quickly go through the Scriptures and realize there is no passage where Jesus says, We must stop slavery and there's nothing in Paul's writing Peters Writing, where they come out and directly say, we must stop slavery. What is striking is that no epistatic testimony ever says that slavery is a divinely instituted ordinance or institution. So the only reason Paul brings

it up here in relationship to marriage, and parents and children is because in many first century settings, a slave was seen as being part of one's household. In fact, even beyond that they were often considered, although exempt from inheritance, they were seen as part of the family. So it makes sense that Paul would bring this issue up. But it's very important to realize that from the perspective of the New Testament, this was not divinely ordained like marriage. It is a part of the culture. As hearts will be changed. We will see this particular aspect of the culture no longer being practiced. But at this point in the first century, slavery was an essential fabric in the Roman Empire. We're not talking about some fringe practice, it was embedded in the Roman culture of that day. And so when seeking here to present the gospel, it speaks first of addressing man's heart, not necessarily certain social institutions. But also we must consider that when Paul's writing this letter to emphasize, historians tell us that approximately one third of the citizens in emphasis would have been slaves. So there's a large part here that are probably slaves for economic security, jobs provision, things like that. So in other words, when we think about this letter being read, you're talking about at least a third of his readers who would be like, I know, I know what you mean by this. I'm a slave. I may be sitting here in worship next to or near my Christian master who is also worshiping with me in Christ. But as soon as the service ends, we're back to the relationship of I am a slave, and he is my master. So this reality was very real for Paul's audience. And it should challenge us to say, how does the Christian faith display itself in that cultural environment. also realize that slavery is used as an illustration in Scripture and in the New Testament, of what our relationship to Jesus Christ should be one marked by obedience, and a submitting of our will, to the will of another. And as I say that, we should all realize why that's not a pressive when Christ is our master, because he is good, because he is all knowing because he knows what will take to make us into His image and reflect Christ. And so for example, look at Ephesians three one. And you notice Paul uses in Ephesians, three, one, not the word, slave. But he says that he is the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles. Now we know that he does mean that literally, this is one of Paul's prison epistles. So he is in prison in Rome. But the word prisoner also means one who is in bonds, one who is bound, and that would fit Paul's other examples where he uses the word slave to talk about his obedience. He's sold out to Christ. Let me read for you Romans one, one. And then I'll jump over to Romans six and Romans one, Paul and typical fashion says Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus. servant is the end Ivy's nice way of saying slave bondservant one who is in bondage to Jesus Christ. Then in Romans six, he carries this imagery of what's so dominant in his culture now into a spiritual illustration, and enrollments, six verses 17 and 18. It says, Thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obey the form of teaching to which you are interested. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. And there we have that perfect illustration that Paul's going to build on. You live in a day in an age where you see this around you Let me elevate them to tell you, there's a picture to us when you think of a slave and a master, the

relationship you should have with Christ. So we're no longer slaves to sin. We rejoice in that. But we should also counter that and rejoice it. Now we're slaves of righteousness. Jesus Christ is our master. So if you go back to Ephesians, chapter six, you can notice how many times and verses five through nine, the word master and Lord is used. What you might want to do is somewhere put a note in your Bible, the word master and Lord are the exact same word. So in other words, you're reading this and it says, slaves obey your earthly curiosity, your earthly Lord. And then later on will say, but you need to obey the Lord. That's the same term. So in other words, if you are hearing this, you'd be making this happen. connection. Yep, I have an earthly, curious Master, but my allegiance is ultimately to my heavenly master Korea. In fact, in Ephesians, there are 26 times Paul uses the title of curiosity, or Lord, only two times, does it refer to an earthly master in that slavery sense? And that is in Ephesians six, verse five. And then in verse nine, God have that bigger context to which were to see this particular relationship on earth through. So that gives us some background as to the practice of slavery. And again, disconnecting it from what American slavery was in our history, which was oppressive and, and and not what we're comparing it to when Paul talks here About the dominance of this relationship economically and his culture. But let's move on to what the council is. What does Paul have to say, in this case, specifically to Christian slaves and Christian masters. And what he says is, again, very much countercultural, but follows the same pattern in marriage, and in parent children who start with this subservient party, the one who is under the authority of another, he'll give some imperatives like, here are the instructions, and then I'll give you a motivation. So let's take a closer look. And as we see here, his instructions to first beginning with slaves. Verse five, slaves obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. So he begins with instruction to slaves. Again, this is unheard of. In any kind of literature and the that day, you would never have directly addressed. Women, wives, children are slaves. Paul breaks all those rules. Because in Christ, we are all one even though there's the different roles that he's addressing. But let's look closely at what he tells them. Keep in mind that what he says to slaves here, that this is written about the same time as the letter of Lehman. Every letter of phi Lehman, he's sending an SMS a runaway slave who's apparently come to Christ, he's sending him back to his Christian master. So it's very striking that you have such council given in two very different settings, but council I completely agree. So you notice in verses five through seven, the council's very specific starts off simply obey, same word used earlier, of husbands and wives, children and parents, this sense of, to not just here, but to do what they say. And we've qualified all that it's always in agreement with God's will. And so I do believe specifically here he is addressing Christian slaves, and they just go to turn and address Christian masters, because this letter is going to a church. But you notice that he breaks down the responsibilities and duties of a slave into four specific descriptions. And the first one you see in verse five, not just obey them, but respect and fear of the word respect would give them the honor, that is There's they're in a position to

over you. And if you're a Christian, you're trusting in God's sovereignty. But then he says in fear and the word fear here is not in fear of your master, or in fear of the consequences of how this might play out in your life. But it's more in fear of the great day you will stand before God. That's the context in which we should see everything in our life, not just one of the immediate expedient results of this. But ultimately, when I stand before God, how is this going to come down, have been faithful to his work? As he says, you first need to obey but not just go through lip service here. Do it with respect and fear. And the second is do it with sincerity of heart. So now we're back to the same principle in marriage and parents and children. Obedience is a must Generate from pure motives. Make sure your motives are right before God. Imagine as Christian slave hearing this, like this almost seems random. And Paul, your first year you're telling us here's things we need to do. Almost may be anticipating. Yeah. All right. Well listen to this. We can't wait till you get to Christian masters. What do you tell them they need to do? Just like sometimes we hear a sermon and we're thinking, this person really needed to hear that. I'm so glad they're here today. Well, Paul, saying no, this is what you need to hear as a Christian slave. Your motives are known by God. Then he goes on Thirdly, you notice that he says in verse six, obey them not only to win their favor where their eyes on you, but like slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart He's already said at the end of verse five, obey them just like you would obey Christ. What a perspective to put on this, that not only don't just go through the motions, but don't do these acts, anticipating or waiting till your master is watching you, so they can catch you doing good. Paul uses a word that some translations bring out a little more clearly says don't do this for I service. And it may have been one of those phrases that Paul himself coined, kind of taking two words together, and sort of saying, don't do this just to be seen and recognized. And that's your danger. We all fall into as Christians, where we want to make sure if we've done something in church, or we do something maybe even at work, we're kind of hoping it was seen by someone will be commented on will come up in your job. Review. Notice he fine tunes as and says, ultimately Yeah, your master may see it but you know what he may not. But that is inconsequential, are you doing it as unto the Lord? And then he sums that up in verse seven and says, serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord and not men. And we come back to that reality of how often in Scripture does it say to us, do this with all your heart? Do it wholeheartedly, and that's a word that embraces the very core of your being the seat of your emotions, and affections. If you are a Christian slave, I think listening to this, your first thought might be I don't know if I can do that. And that would be good because Paul saying you're right. You can't do this. On your own apart from Christ. This is a work of sanctification and You that is going to be ongoing just like it is with us. I mean, have you turned to First Timothy chapter six, because in in finding this text about slaves and masters, there are a number of places in the New Testament where Paul Peter, and now Paul to Timothy, deal with this issue in the church where they mentioned, knowing that there are Christian masters and Christian slaves and the same worship

service where they give wise counsel from God. So in First Timothy six, listen to verses one and two, all who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of respect. So that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. Those who are believing masters and to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better. Because those who benefit from their service are believers and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them on an interesting perspective, not only to your Christian masters be worthy, but then realizing here's a flip abuse that can happen. You're kind of like, well, they're my brother in the Lord. So, hey, give me a break here. Or maybe we should be even, you know, you can't just tell me what to do. I can tell you what I think you should do. A second recognizing here that he's not saying change the relationship of servant and master to two servants equal in the culture, but he's saying as a Christian, you need to even honor them to a greater degree, if they're a believer, because of the benefit that you're serving. Service is reaping let's go back to Ephesians six. And in this list of imperatives, here's what you need to do as a Christian slave, you get to verse eight. And now we have the motivation. The motivation is put before them, because you know, that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is a slave or free, says because you know not because you feel that because you know this because hopefully now in your walk with Christ, you have apprehended this truth. And this is not saying you're saved by doing what is good. This is saying because you are saved here is evidence and display of your faith in Christ by how you respond, and how you serve your Christian master. So a very in a sense, explicit detailed instructions. Slaves Christian slaves. So you're a Christian slave you're hearing this right now Paul must maybe he's gonna say something. The Christian masters what what's God expect of them? And you get to verse nine, and it's very succinctly stated, and masters, treat your slaves in the same way. He doesn't need to rehearse and go back over everything he's saying, I just told you what how you are to respond to that one who is over you, that is how they equally as a brother in Christ should respond. entreat you. We could simply say, Paul says, Did you heard what I said to you? Same thing holds for masters. What a shocking countercultural statement in a culture that saw masters as having all authority all power. And certainly that is abused in many cases in the culture. But Paul's holding up this ideal just like he does in the book of Phi Lehman. Now as a Christian Master, how do you treat? How do you receive those who are under your care who are Christians, as well? And it gives us some indication of how at least the culture work because you notice in verse nine, says, Do not threaten them. You could read that phrase more like this, stop threatening them. So in that day and age, if you want to get someone to do something, especially if they're your slave, threatened, use force. If it works, do it. Paul saying not not only is that not to be a part of your testimony as a Christian, but if you doing that, you gotta stop that right away. That's wrong. Then he gets to the reminder since you know that he who is both their Lord or master and yours is in heaven. What a way of putting that in a perfect tense, like looking back and saying,

you're a Christian Master, you know who Christ is. So from that very moment of your conversion, you have a new master. And your master is the same Master, that that Christian brother or sister in Christ has as well. What a way of just saying to Christian masters, you need to take this seriously. This is a part of how you can display your faith in Christ. How in a sense, you could argue you can transform culture as Christ is transforming you. That all seems well and clear. He says, you have the same Master, there is no favoritism with him. Other word favoritism simply means that God does not judge based on external factors. Because God does judge, and he does distinguish between those who are his children and those who are not. But the reality is here for the Christian masters, to think of the fact that they have a master. I didn't that echo through the same teaching in a sense with for parents and children. Power parents are in that position of authority, but they're not all powerful. They have a greater authority over them in Christ. And in the marriage, the husband may be in the position to be the head, but But does he have an authority greater than himself over him. So notice the consistency Paul's teaching here. But that brings us to the ultimate question or thought where the implications for today? Because we don't have slavery like this. So how can we look at this and say, well, Paul has something to say through the Holy Spirit, not just to a first century world, not just to the Roman Empire, but to you and me as Christians. Let me hopefully bring out two I think lessons that are relevant. One is to the fact that all expressions of authority are to reflect the character of Christ. And that we see here that you don't have to name and, and pinpoint and say, Well, this has to be like that, because then it's too time bound. But as Ephesians, reminding us, whatever level and expression of authority, especially as Christians, that should always somehow reflected the character of Christ. So we look at how people are to lead in the church they are to lead with gentleness and respect. They are to correct but they're to do so in the right spirit. And that's saying to us, yes, God has given authority, he's a structured things. But how one conducts themselves as a believer, is vital. And I don't think it's too far to say in a much closer level, that you can say this passage does address, although we're not comparing slavery to work, but it does address relationships, interaction for Christian employees and Christian employers. In other words, this is kind of saying whether you're a Christian employee, or one who is a Christian employer over other people, and in particular, maybe over other Christians That you are to display integrity, justice, and the mercy of God in that respective position. And I would even go so far as to say, if you do volunteer work for some organization, you are to reflect in your relationship to those who are over you who are answerable who you're doing the work for, you are to reflect the integrity, the justice, and the mercy of God. So really, I should lead us because I know we have. Some people in our congregation work others are at the point where they've been able to retire is how you pray for each other during the week. And then I begin with just ask yourself, do you even know where the different people who do leave the home and have to go outside the home to work where they even work? Like she can pray for them in that workplace? That they would display these

characteristics. For those who are retired, do you know who they are and how you can pray for them in terms of their community involvement that they do for ways in which they interact with others in the community that may have positions of authority over them. Some of you start to realize this verse has everything to do with how we interact and how we seek to display Christ, not just in our marriages, not just in our relationships with children and grandchildren and grown children, but but in our relationship, and society, and our relationship in the workplace. The wonder, Paul would say in a very similar household kind of code, and collages, whatever you do, do it with all your heart, as unto the Lord to maybe work God this weekend in our vocations, in our workplaces, in our retirement. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for just how true and practical Your word is. And the issue is never that we don't see the connection are our hearts need to be changed. Our hearts need to be softened. Lord you need by your spirit to work in us that we would desire to love you with all of our heart, soul strength and mind to fear you and to serve you. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.